



# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

## news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT TO BE PREPARED ON DISPOSITION OF  
FEDERAL PROPERTY ON MATAGORDA ISLAND, TEXAS; PUBLIC COMMENTS SOUGHT

The Department of the Interior and the General Services Administration (GSA) will prepare a joint environmental impact statement on a proposal from the State of Texas to transfer 19,000 acres of Federal property on Matagorda Island, Texas, to the State. Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks G. Ray Arnett said that under the proposal, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department would manage the property as a State Park/Wildlife Management Area.

A public meeting will be held to identify any major impacts that might result if the proposed action is implemented and to identify all significant issues that must be covered in the environmental impact statement.

Matagorda Island is a 50,500-acre barrier island off the Texas Gulf Coast south of Port O'Connor. About 20,000 acres are owned by the State of Texas and about 11,500 acres are privately owned. The remaining 19,000 acres are the site of a former Air Force base and are owned by the Federal Government. Since 1971, this property has been managed by the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as part of Aransas National Wildlife Refuge, under a memorandum of understanding between the Secretaries of the Interior and the Air Force. The Air Force declared the property excess to its needs in 1975. Since then both the Fish and Wildlife Service and the State of Texas have applied to GSA requesting transfer of the property. The Service and the State have also held extensive discussions over the past several years concerning disposition of the Federal property.

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Matagorda Island is a valuable wildlife area that is attractive to migratory birds. Some whooping cranes from the endangered 73-bird flock that winters at nearby Aransas National Wildlife Refuge cross the bay to use habitat on Matagorda Island. The birds--numbering from an average of 11 to as many as 19--primarily use the State-owned tidelands on Matagorda.

Matagorda is also wintering habitat for an average of 12 to 15 thousand ducks and three thousand geese, and large populations of mourning doves use the island during spring and fall migration. Falcons, hawks, and kites also use the island during their migrations.

The principal alternatives that the environmental impact statement will examine have been identified as follows:

- (1) No action.
- (2) Terminate the 1971 memorandum of understanding between the Departments of the Air Force and the Interior; withdraw the Fish and Wildlife Service's application to GSA for transfer of the Federal property; GSA to convey or authorize the conveyance of the 19,000 acres of Federal property to the State of Texas to be administered by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.
- (3) Transfer administrative jurisdiction of the Federal property to the Fish and Wildlife Service.
- (4) Joint Federal and State ownership of the property.
- (5) No State or Fish and Wildlife Service management. Convey Federal lands to other public bodies or the private sector through GSA disposition procedures.

A public meeting will be held in Corpus Christi, Texas, on March 8 from 9 a.m. to 11 p.m. at Bayfront Plaza Convention Center, Room 223, 1901 North Shoreline. Persons interested in making an oral presentation at the Texas meeting should contact Mr. Thomas Smith (Acting ARD-ARW), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, P.O. Box 1306, Albuquerque, New Mexico 87103 (505/766-2174). Oral presentations will be limited to 10 minutes. Written statements or comments may be submitted and should be sent to the Regional Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, P.O. Box 1306, Albuquerque, New Mexico 87103. Written comments should be received no later than March 11, 1982. The draft environmental impact statement is expected to be available to the public in late May 1982.

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